



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE DELUGE IN OTHER LITERATURES AND HISTORY.¹

By WILLIAM R. HARPER,
The University of Chicago.

The outside stories.—Theories presented in explanation of the facts narrated in the deluge stories.—Comparison of the biblical with the outside material: similarities, differences.—Our estimate of the biblical material.—Not a myth.—Not a legend.—Idealized history.—The purpose of the prophetic writer, the purpose of the priestly writer.

In a former article on the deluge the biblical material was examined. This article is to deal with the stories of the deluge found in other literatures. After an examination of these stories it will be possible to do three things: 1) Discuss the various theories concerning the deluge stories taken together; 2) compare the biblical material with the material from other literatures; and 3) form an estimate of the biblical material.

I. *The Outside Stories.*—Hundreds of pages would be necessary to present at all adequately the stories of the deluge which have come down to us in literatures outside of the Hebrew literature. It will be at once clear that there is no space even for an abstract of the various statements. It is true that some of the stories are more interesting than others. But no satisfactory conclusions can be reached except upon the basis of an examination of all or practically all of the material. Lenormant, in *The Beginnings of History*,² presents the essential parts of most of these stories. In various commentaries on Genesis there will be found in connection with the comments on Genesis 6–9, references and allusions to the stories. In Lenormant's presentation, the authorities are given for each statement made. The reader, therefore, is referred to this collection of material for the facts, it being impossible to present

¹ For literature, see preceding article.

² Pages 387, and following.

them in the small space at our disposal. The most important of all the stories, the Chaldean, will be found translated in full in the February number of the *BIBLICAL WORLD*. The reader is referred also to this article. It is to be remembered that a copy of the Assyrian account, now in our possession, was made about 700 B. C. by order of Asur-bani-pal, from an old copy in the library of the city of Uruk. This older copy goes back to 1,800 or 2,000 years before Christ. The existence of the story was known before the discovery of the tablets by accounts handed down by Berossus, a Chaldean priest living in the time of Alexander the Great and his successors. Fragments of his work furnished some of the most important details of the story. The original itself, referred to above, was found by George Smith, in 1872, among certain brick tablets brought from Nineveh. It was given to the world for the first time in the *London Daily News*, December 5, 1872. Besides the Assyrian story the student will read and examine also (1) the Aramæan, (2) the Sanskrit, (3) the Persian, (4) the various Greek stories, (5) the Phrygian, (6) the Scandinavian, (7) the Lithuanian, (8) the Celtic, (9) the Egyptian, (10) the American, (11) the Polynesian. A few remarks may be made upon the supposition that the details of the various stories referred to above are familiar to the reader. 1) There is, of course, great divergence of matter, each story exhibiting a coloring which is characteristic of the country in which it has its origin. The maritime nations present it in certain forms; inland nations in still other forms. 2) Notwithstanding the very great divergence, the essential facts are found to be the same. Wickedness, punishment for wickedness, a great storm or deluge, the destruction of humanity, the deliverance of a few, the adoption of these few as special favorites of the God or gods,—these general ideas are found everywhere. 3) It is at once apparent to any one who has examined the material, that while some of it may be regarded as late and consequently based upon the biblical narrative, much of it is as old as the biblical narrative or even older.

The main problems which present themselves for solution are two, namely, the historical and the literary; the first dealing

with the deluge itself, the second with the various narratives which concern the deluge; the first having to do with the actual event which is described in all the stories; the second with the inter-relationship of the stories themselves.

II. *Theories presented in explanation of the facts narrated in the deluge stories.*

1. According to Goldziher, Grill, and many other students of comparative mythology, we are to understand these various stories as different forms of the naturalistic myth respecting rains and floods in general. The possibilities of explanation under this head are as numerous as the authors themselves. For lack of space these possibilities are here omitted.

2. The original story is a mythical picture of the setting of the sun. Just as, according to Schirren, one may trace all the old cosmogonies to mythical descriptions of the rising of the sun, so the various stories of the deluge may be traced to a mythical picture of the setting of the sun. This explanation also may be passed by without further comment.

3. The deluge is a mythical presentation of creation. Cheyne, the writer on this subject in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, presents this view in the following language: "The story of the deluge is a subdivision of the primitive man's cosmogony. The problem with which he had to deal was a complicated one—given the eternity of matter to account for the origin of the world. The best solution which presented itself was to represent creation as having taken place repeatedly, and the world as having passed through a series of demolitions and reconstructions. This explains the confusion between the creation and the deluge noticed by various travelers, a confusion, however, which is only apparent, for the deluge is, when thoroughly realized, practically a second creation. The various deluge stories must be viewed in combination and explained on a common principle. What was the original significance of the non-biblical stories? Not merely an annual recurring river flood such as those of the Euphrates, for the phenomenal basis of myths must be something striking and wonderful as well as frequently recurring.

The phenomena of the sky and especially of the sun are daily miracles. The deluge of these stories has been transferred from the skies to the earth. It is an ether myth. The attempt to explain the existence of the world on the basis of an ether myth was not uncommon. The deluge was not the last of these destructions. Some races supposed a great fire to have swept over the earth and to have destroyed all save a few who hid themselves in caves."

4. We may understand the basis of the deluge story to be a legend transmitting historical memories which, though mythical and colored, have still the fate of actual men as their subject—an historical origin.

This is the view advanced by Delitzsch.¹

5. We may regard the deluge as a historical fact preserved in a multitude of forms. Here several points deserve consideration. (*a*) Every nation, it is asserted by Lenormant, except the black race, has a tradition of the deluge. (*b*) This tradition wherever found is essentially the same. (*c*) We may grant that in America and in Oceanica it is not independent but an early importation. (*d*) Granting this, however, it remains true that a tradition is found in the Indo-European, the Semitic, the Egyptian, or Hamitic families. (*e*) These facts do not permit us to assume as the origin of these stories a myth either naturalistic or cosmogonic, because as Delitzsch has said, the story is too specifically human, because, further, it is too universal, and still further, because such an explanation partakes too much of the arbitrary. (*f*) Nor is the historical element so slight as to allow us to call it, with Delitzsch, a legend. The deluge is an histor-

¹ "Human history as well as the natural world, left its reflection upon the consciousness, and as there were nature-myths in which natural phenomena were incorporated, so also there were historic memories transmitted in the form of legends which, though mythologically colored, have still the fate of actual men as their subject. Such a legend is that of the deluge, which is in the scriptural account brought down by the removal of all mythological embellishment to historical purpose. The Babylonio-Assyrian account is far more fanciful and interesting, and hence more poetical, but like that of the Bible so specifically human, that it would be quite as arbitrary to make the waters of Noah a picture of the ocean of heaven as to generalize the victorious expedition of Alexander into a picture of the victory of the sun over mist and darkness."

—*Commentary on Genesis*, page 237.

ical fact, "an actual and terrible event which made so powerful an impression upon the imaginations of the first parents of our species that their descendants could never forget it. This cataclysm took place near the primitive cradle of mankind and previous to the separation of the families from whom the principal races were to descend." Among three races it was primitive and these were the descendants of Ham, Shem and Japheth. Having now decided as to the character of the event which forms the subject of the stories, we may compare the stories themselves.

III. *A Comparison of the Biblical with the Outside Material.*

1. *Similarities.*—In all, or nearly all of the stories there will be found allusions to the following topics: Wickedness, the announcement, the command to build, the contents of the ark, the entering into the ark, the coming of the waters, a certain duration, the appearance of land, birds, the altar and the sacrifice, the Divine repentance, the rainbow. Kalisch has thus summarized it: "Scarcely a single feature of the biblical account which is not discovered in one or several of the heathen traditions. Coincidences not limited to details; they extend to the whole outlines; it is almost everywhere the sin of man which renders the determination of an all just judge irrevocable; one pious man is saved with his family to form the nucleus of a new population; an ark is introduced; and pairs of the animal creation are collected; birds are sent out to ascertain the condition of the earth; an altar is built and sacrifices are offered. It is certain that none of these accounts are derived from the pages of the Bible. They are independent of each other. Their differences are as striking and characteristic as their analogies; they are echoes of a sound which had long vanished away."

2. *Differences.*—Under this head we may take as example the one outside story which is recognized as standing first in every particular—the Assyrian. If now we compare the biblical account with the Assyrian, we note dissimilarities in reference to form and contents; for example, a difference in respect to size and

name of the ark. The length of the ark according to the Bible being six to one, the Assyrian ten to one; a difference as to occupants, the Assyrian account including the ship builders and relatives. There is nothing in the Assyrian account concerning the clean and unclean. In the Assyrian account the duration is seven days, the birds being sent out seven days after. The Assyrian story includes among the birds, besides the dove and raven, the swallow which is not found in the Hebrew story. The place according to the Assyrian story is Nizir, east of Assyria; the Hebrew story the mountains of Ararat. The fate of the hero in each case is different. In the one case he is deified; in the other he is allowed to live a long period of years. It would be interesting here to take up the question of relative age of the two stories—the Hebrew and the Assyrian, but such consideration may perhaps be best postponed.

The dissimilarities in reference to the spirit and purpose are greater. The Assyrian story is grossly anthropomorphic; including the representation of the gods crouching like dogs, and again of the gods gathering like flies before the master of the sacrifices; while the anthropomorphic element in the Hebrew story is very slight indeed and never grotesque. The Assyrian account is polytheistic; the Hebrew everywhere monotheistic. There is no purpose in the Assyrian account except to explain the deification of man. The purpose of the Hebrew story stands out in every verse. One reads the Assyrian story and discovers no teaching whatever; while in the Hebrew account the greatest of all teaching is found; punishment for wickedness, deliverance for righteousness. We find nowhere in the Hebrew story allusions to spirits quarrelling among the gods, to the deification of man. And as to the relative influence of the two stories, who can fail to see the superiority of the Hebrew?

IV. Our Estimate of the Biblical Material.

I. Is it a naturalistic myth of rain, or the setting of the sun, or of the cosmogony? No.

2. Is it an historical legend? An event—an impression made upon the mind—the impression colored or embellished—and this

mythological element removed; reduced to historical prose? There may be no general objection to this view, but the specific objection is that it minimizes the historical element. This event was too serious, too great, too well attested to be classified merely as a legend. We cannot call the Hebrew account of creation a legend; the creation was a fact, and the great teachings which these stories disclose are fundamentally true. We cannot call the Hebrew account of the fall of man a legend. Other nations may have made legends out of the same material, but the Hebrew nation has not done this. The fall was a great fact of history, and we have it narrated together with the powerful religious lessons connected with it in such a manner as most forcibly to teach, most authoritatively to declare these truths. Just so with the deluge. There is no legend here. Is it literal history? No. Nor is the Book of Job history, nor the Books of Chronicles, nor the Books of Kings, nor the Books of Samuel.

4. *It is idealized history.*—What now is meant by idealized history? The selection of an event and the writing of a narrative of it in order to accomplish a purpose. What are the characteristics of such history? They may be summarized as follows: (1) The writer is not careful to arrange his material chronologically. A better arrangement perhaps may be found to accomplish the end he has in view. (2) He does not think it necessary to narrate all the facts, for many of the facts will not bear upon the purpose he has in view. (3) Outside facts are suggested because they will assist in enabling him to present the idea which is at the basis of the whole statement. (4) Details are disregarded which do not bear directly upon his purpose. (5) Those details which do stand closely related with the purpose he has in mind are expanded. (6) The narrative is everywhere colored by the writer's position. (7) The artistic element is found to prevail everywhere. (8) The influence everywhere is seen of a purpose. Idealized history—history written to convey an idea, especially a religious idea, is something very different from a mere cold, scientific statement in precise chronological order of the facts connected with a particular event.

5. If this is idealized history, that is, history written with a purpose, what was the purpose which the historical statement was intended to serve? We must remember that we have here two narratives; one from the pen of the prophet, the other from the pen of the priest. Each had his particular purpose, and we must keep these distinct.

The *prophetic* writer has already told us (1) how man once was innocent and, in this state of innocence, on familiar terms with God and possessed of all the happiness that God could bestow on man, blessed and immortal—but he sinned, and instead of this blessing there was a curse. (2) How one brother kills another and thus crime quickly enters the world, the consequence of sin; (3) how the line of the murderer becomes worse and worse; cities, the centre of corruption and iniquity, are founded; music, sensual in its influence, and weapons of war, for all cruelty and blood-shed, are invented; polygamy is introduced, and all this is the result, the inevitable consequence, and the dire concomitant of sin; (4) how this sin, great enough in itself, is enhanced by the example of angels who left their heavenly abode and mingled with women—their off-spring giants and demons, instigators of lawlessness and crime. (5) And now the end has come. Jehovah has endured all that even a God can endure. Man has become wicked, utterly depraved. There must be a new beginning. The old race shall die; the deluge punishes the world for its sin; the deluge purifies the world of its iniquity. Could anything be more reasonable or more consistent? What was his purpose? Clearly and distinctly to show that for sin man must die. The story is told most pathetically. The sacred numbers 7 and 40 are used. They both represent completeness, sufficiency. Sufficient warning was given; rain sufficient came down; a sufficient delay was granted; the time is nothing; the details are nothing, save as they furnish a vivid and pathetic picture. All this is form, coloring. The essential fact, destruction and death sent by a just God for sin, this is real. And the purpose? the same which has characterized every sentence which we have thus far studied from the prophet's pen, the same which we shall find to characterize every new

sentence, every new story throughout the Books of the Pentateuch. Nay more, the same which characterizes every story in the Books of Samuel and Kings.

What now is the purpose which was intended by the priest? The *priestly* writer has told us (1) of the orderly and systematic origin of the earth and sky, created in six days, a creation including as its crowning feature the covenant with Adam by which all things created were made subject to him, and also the institution of the sabbath, the greatest of all divine institutions; (2) of the symmetrical progress of the world's history from Adam to Noah—ten patriarchs living so many years, begetting each a son living so many more years, begetting sons and daughters and dying—chronological, statistical, minute, accurate, definite, stereotyped, characterized by a single idea; (3) he now makes a note, repetitious and redundant, of man's wickedness and of God's determination to destroy; (4) then follows a description, equally as repetitious and minute, strangely statistical and definite, of the deluge through which the destruction is to be wrought. The exact size of the ark, the exact statement of its contents, the 600th year, 15 cubits above the highest mountain the waters prevail; exactly 150 days the waters increase. In the 601st year, first month, first day, the water subsides, the deluge has lasted just 365 days. These numbers are ideal. No man knew the duration. There were scores of opinions and traditions. To one of mathematical frame of mind, what could seem better than to represent it as a year? The creation had been put in the form of a week; the deluge is given the form of a year. The creation stories led up to the institution of the Sabbath; the deluge story leads up to the institution, the command respecting the shedding of blood. The creation included a covenant with Adam; the deluge story includes a covenant with Noah in largely the same language, appointing or reappointing him lord over all the earth and authorizing him to eat flesh. The covenant assures him that there shall not be another deluge. This covenant is the goal, the purpose of the priest. He has reached the second of the three preliminary stages of his work preparatory to the recording of the legislation as given to Moses

on Sinai, and the great covenant there ratified with the people. This, in each case, is the purpose of our writers. Could anything higher, or more worthy be conceived? The deluge was a fact; it was a part of a great plan; its record as handed down to us in the Hebrew Scriptures is the one clear, distinct account, and when compared with the other accounts bears on its face indications of its divine origin.